

# A New Beginning

## The 2018 Legislative Session



GEORGIA VOCATIONAL  
REHABILITATION AGENCY

January 2018

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# Under the Gold Dome

## An Opportunity to Share Our Success

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Some days, my job is easy because of the hard work all of you do. This legislative session, that holds true because I have the opportunity to be the bearer of good news. That's not always the case when

state leaders and legislative leaders come together, and organizations are held accountable for the events and accomplishments of the previous fiscal year.

But this year, I relish being the messenger. As lawmakers gather under the Gold Dome to sort out the state's budget, consider often contentious topics, and sort through a mountain of proposed legislation, I'll be talking about a young attorney who's able to practice, in part, because GVRA helped equip his new accessible van. We'll highlight a client who found a job that ignited his passion for woodworking after coming to GVRA from a sheltered workshop. I'll show off the list of our top-earning clients placed in State Fiscal Year 2017, led by a computer systems analyst who attained a salary of more than \$132,000. There are also the successes from Cave Spring Center, which held its first official graduation ceremony in December, and Roosevelt Warm Springs, where the most recent graduating class set a record high employment rate of 58%. And as we do every time we share our successes, we'll have an opportunity to advance our belief that the first option considered for all people, regardless of

disability, is integrated employment leading to financial independence.

In the early days of each session, the Governor delivers the State of the State address. I can sincerely say I am proud the state of GVRA, and you should all be proud of yourselves. While there's always more work to be done and different, innovative ways to serve our clients and operate our programs, we have momentum. We have listened to different populations who told us they needed a greater focus, and we continue to implement changes based on what we've heard. We are looking forward to the implementation of the AWARE system, which will make your jobs easier and customer service better. And this year, we also embrace the stability that is equally vital to the health of an organization, as new leaders grow confident in their roles and we continue to refine newly integrated business process until they work like a well-oiled machine.

As we share our mission and purpose not just with the legislature but within your communities, thank you for allowing me to deliver your message and tell your stories. I know you join me in anticipating all 2018 has to offer.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Sean T. Casey".

Sean T. Casey  
Executive Director




# Return on Investment

## How GVRA Jumpstarts the Georgia Economy

*It's hard to ignore the numbers. For each client that GVRA helps find work and live independently, there's a quantifiable contribution back to the Georgia economy.*

*Below is a quick and easy fact sheet that highlights some of GVRA's contributions to the economy and possibly more importantly, the lives of so many individuals across the state..*

*Please feel free to share this information with clients, partners or any interested parties.. In just a few numbers, it paints a pretty accurate picture of how GVRA is contributing to the state at large.*

 <div> <b>SFY 2017</b>  <b>Fast Facts</b> </div>	
<b>The Return on Georgia's Investment</b>	
<b>Vocational Rehabilitation</b>	<b>\$21,121,103</b>
<b>Employment and independence for individuals with disabilities</b>	
<b>Total Client Income</b>	<b>\$78,497,115</b>
<b>Individuals Employed</b>	<b>4,554</b>
<b>Clients who supported themselves at application</b>	<b>588</b>
<b>Clients who supported themselves at closure</b>	<b>3,817</b>
<b>Academic students served at Roosevelt Warm Springs (RWS)</b>	<b>256</b>
<b>Business Enterprise Program</b>	<b>\$286,485</b>
<b>Provides entrepreneurship opportunities to individuals who are blind</b>	
<b>Vendors</b>	<b>67</b>
<b>Total Vendor Income</b>	<b>\$8,325,949</b>

	<b>SFY 2017</b> <b>Fast Facts</b>
<b>Top Earning Clients Employed</b>	
<i>(earnings reported weekly)</i>	
<b>Computer Systems Analyst</b>	
\$2,533.34	
<b>Lawyer in metro Atlanta District Attorney's office</b>	
\$2,375.00	
<b>Sales Manager at international technology company</b>	
\$2,040.00	
<b>Civil Engineer at metro Atlanta public school district</b>	
\$2,019.23	
<b>Production worker through Staffing agency</b>	
\$1,940.00	

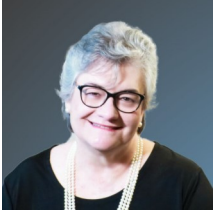


# GQRS Board Member Spotlight

## Featuring Louise Hill

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*Editor's Note: In this section, we'll be doing monthly profiles of each of the Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Services board members.*



Hill is a public service and outreach faculty member at the University of Georgia's Fanning Institute where her focus is in community leadership development

programs.

Prior to her current role, Hill served as the director of development and alumni relations for the College of Agricultural and Environmental Sciences. Before joining the university, she was director of program development and education for the Georgia Farm Bureau Federation.

Hill holds an associate's degree from Abraham Baldwin Agricultural College, a

bachelor's degree in Science and a master's degree in Education from the University of Georgia.

"Being a part of helping individuals with disabilities find meaningful work is why I serve on the GQRA Board," she said. "We have had some challenges as we oversaw the establishment of the new organization, but I am excited to see things getting on track under our current leadership. I am especially pleased about the training programs that will be launched this year. I am an advocate for training and believe that will make the greatest difference in reaching our organizational goals."

## Calendar of Events

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January 28 through 30  
GAEL Winter Conference  
Classic Center  
300 N Thomas Street  
Athens, GA 30601

February 8  
11 a.m. to 2 p.m.  
Independent Living Day at the Capitol  
Georgia State Capitol  
206 Washinton Street SW  
Atlanta, GA 30334

February 13  
Executive Leadership Development Training  
Atlanta, GA

March 8 and 9  
Association for the Education and  
Rehabilitation of the Blind and Visually  
Impaired Conference  
AMAC  
512 Means Street NW  
Atlanta, GA 30318







Meet Sgt. Christopher Cox, serving our country in Afghanistan. He sent us this picture after receiving a care package from Georgia Industries for the Blind, which included this notebook.



# A Star

## Remembering a Great Partner

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By Rehabilitation Technologist Virginia “Gigi” Taylor

Dozens of emails. Maybe hundreds. And an unknown quantity of phone calls. I often turned to Brandy Jones of STARS. She was a dedicated and helpful provider for many people of GVRA. Who can equal her? It broke my heart to hear of her untimely death on Thanksgiving Day.

Who knew as much about blindness and technology as Brandy? Let me rephrase that... who understood assistive technology (AT) and what it could do like Brandy? Not just blindness technologies, but basically all kinds of assistive technologies.

I loved talking things over with her. I loved how she combined her vocational rehabilitation counseling knowledge with her zeal for assistive technology. I loved how she thought about the possibilities that assistive technology offered. We enjoyed sharing ideas of the “what ifs” that could help GVRA clients.

Where did I turn to find out important information about compatibility in technologies? Sure, I did my own research. But sometimes to check myself I would reach out to Brandy. She was smart about mixing platforms or operating systems and combining old technology with new computer systems.

To do AT properly, one must be keen on details. Brandy was. She would remember cables and connectors when piecing printers, scanners, cameras and gadgets together in a delivery or at a set up at a client’s house or a training session.

When items were lagging in delivery, she would eagerly track items, check mailing addresses and be concerned about

promised dates. And the follow up? Brandy would check in faithfully. She cared if the systems did what we promised clients they would do.

I remember when I first met her face-to-face at her home in Oakwood. Her assistant was sick that day so although she was independent in her own home, there were a couple of instances when she relied on my sight to help her locate something. For the longest time of our interactions and workings together, I had no idea she was blind.

She was just Brandy. Handling everything. No matter what I emailed her or called her about – she simply found answers for me.

Sure, perhaps over time there were instances when things didn’t work out perfectly. But the only two things that I knew that ever actually slowed her down was when her email went down and when her good friend Randy died. But even then, she was somehow still able to deliver goods, services and good advice. I depended on her.

She was more than a provider; she was a star. There was a special day when she and her assistant came to the Marietta VR office to demonstrate some assistive technology over a lunch and learn.

My colleagues appreciated her. Perhaps even marveled over her message and abilities. She spoke of things that seemingly only a sighted person would know. Occasionally one might hear her state that she was blind, but hardly ever. She found answers for hard-to-find solutions no matter how impossible they may have





seemed to me.

I always felt assured when I spoke to her about what I was trying to help a client achieve with assistive technology. She got it. She always got it. She knew just what to ask of me and reminded me what to ask of my client. With good information, she could deliver.

She knew what to do. She knew how to help. Yes, she was to me, a star.



## Get to Know a Legislator

### This Month We Feature Sen. Bill Cowsert

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Sen. Bill Cowsert, a Republican, was elected to the Georgia State Senate in 2006. His Senate peers elected him Majority Leader in 2014. He represents the citizens of Clarke, Oconee and Walton counties.

Sen. Cowsert serves as vice chair of the Judiciary Committee. He also serves on the Appropriations, Administrative Affairs, Committee on Assignments, Health and Human Services, Reapportionment and Redistricting and Regulated Industries Committees. Additionally, he serves as Ex-Officio on the Rules, Finance and Transportation Committees.

Born Sept. 1, 1958, in Jackson, Miss., and raised in Macon, Sen. Cowsert graduated from Macon Central High School and earned a B.S. in Business Administration from Presbyterian College and a Law Degree from the University of Georgia School of Law.

Sen. Cowsert is a founding partner of the Athens' based law firm Cowsert & Avery. He is the past president of the Athens Sertoma Club and Clarke County Heart Association, and is a board member of the Athens Touchdown Club.

Senator Cowsert and his wife, Amy, are the parents of three grown children: Will, Bob, and Caty. They are members of the First Presbyterian Church of Athens, where Sen. Cowsert is an elder.



# 2018 State Holidays

## Put These on Your Calendar

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Martin Luther King Jr.'s  
Birthday

January 15

State Holiday

January 19 — Will be observed  
on November 23

Washington's Birthday

February 19 — Will be  
observed Dec. 24

State Holiday

April 26 — Will be observed  
April 23

Memorial Day

May 28

Independence Day

July 4

Labor Day

September 3

Columbus Day

October 8

Veterans Day

November 11 — Will be  
observed November 12

Thanksgiving Day

November 22

Christmas Day

December 25

# Name in Lights

## VR Client Featured in Times Square

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By Karlee Kuc, for The Red and Black

Jordan Huffman, a University of Georgia student whose mother captured his excitement upon being accepted to UGA's Destination Dawgs program in a video that went viral last year, has more news to be excited about.

Huffman was selected to be featured in a video created by the National Down Syndrome Society that ran on a billboard in Times Square throughout the month of October, which was Down Syndrome Awareness Month. Huffman said ahead of time that he was looking forward to October.

"I'm really, really, really, really excited," he said.

The video was a part of National Down Syndrome Society's Down Syndrome awareness campaign, which was created to "celebrate people with Down Syndrome and make people aware of our abilities and accomplishments," the NDSS website said. Since his acceptance, Huffman has been participating in Destination Dawgs, an inclusive post-secondary education program for students with intellectual or developmental disabilities.

Destination Dawgs brought its first class to UGA in January 2017 and is a non-degree certificate program that aims to help students with intellectual or developmental disabilities with the "transition to adulthood," according to the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development website. The J.W. Fanning Institute teams up with Destination Dawgs for a summer leadership institute. Destination Dawgs works out of the Institute on Human Development and Disability in the College

of Family and Consumer Sciences.

The competitive program offers its participants an opportunity to prepare for a career over the course of five spring and fall semesters.

Huffman and other participants attend UGA courses, gain job skills, have access to UGA email addresses and football tickets and build social networks based on individual plans supported by peer mentors, said Anna Lawrence, the Destination Dawgs program coordinator.

"I love it [the Destination Dawgs Program] a lot," Huffman said. "It's a great program because I get to see all my friends from high school and hang out with all my mentors — they are really, really, really nice."

Adam Goodman, a junior Marketing major from Fayetteville, serves as one of his peer mentors.

"You can just tell the kids love it here. They love going to college just like any person would love going to college, and they love learning a lot," Goodman said. "They get to meet good people too. The mentors have been awesome to them. It's a great experience for me and a great experience for them."

According to the J.W. Fanning Institute for Leadership Development, the Destination Dawgs program was implemented after a 2013-2015 feasibility study on inclusive post-secondary education at UGA.

However, UGA is not the only school that has a program for students with intellectual





or developmental disabilities. "They are starting to open up more programs like this at different schools," Goodman said. "It is important that kids with disabilities have the same opportunities as other kids to go to college."

There are currently 268 college programs in the U.S. for students with intellectual disabilities, according to Think College, a national organization that promotes inclusive higher education.

Along with UGA, Kennesaw University, Georgia Southern University, the Georgia

Institute of Technology and others in Georgia offer programs for students with intellectual disabilities.

## Getting it Done One GVRA Client's Success Story

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By Team Lead Lisa Sipp

One of the most difficult careers to have is that of a Certified Rehabilitation Counselor.

You are instrumental in assisting in changing and enhancing the lives of others, and that can be difficult. At times, you may even second guess yourself.

"Am I doing what is most beneficial for this client?" you'll think. "If it were me or my relative, would I provide these services to them?"

In some instances, you only get a short window to connect with your client and develop a relationship, and that's what counseling is all about: developing relationships with others that will help them grow into who they are and who they are to become.

In August 2016, I had the opportunity of having the Shantavia Hutchings' case transferred to me. This was her second go round with VR. This time, her case had been in the Macon office since March 2015.

She had initially expressed interest in participating in one service with her previous counselor. However, it did not turn out to be a good fit for her. After a few meetings between Shantavia, her mother and me, we were able to agree upon a different program for her to participate in—Supported Employment.

When I first met Shantavia, she was quiet, appeared timid, and did not maintain eye contact. She did not wear any color other than black. After a few meetings and establishing a relationship between Shantavia and her mother, they agreed to meet with Fran Holmes of FH Vocational Concepts. After regular meetings with Fran and Annie, I began to notice a change in Shantavia. She had begun to transform into someone who could maintain eye contact a little more each meeting.

During each session with Annie, she was provided with strategies that allowed her to improve her skills in answering questions, feeling comfortable enough to go to



different stores in the community. I observed her becoming less timid and more confident in her abilities.

Through the Job Readiness Training and Personal and Social Adjustment Training that she received, she became confident enough to engage in job interviews. After a few interviews at various establishments, she finally got hired at Publix as a Courtesy Clerk.

The day of her interview, she came by the office to see me. She was wearing a crimson colored blouse and was smiling from ear to ear! That was the first time that I saw her wearing something other than a black colored outfit. Annie later told me that the interview went well and the Publix Manager was impressed with Shantavia. She got the

job in April of 2017.

Annie began working with Shantavia at Publix to provide support, and one day, the manager asked her why she was there. Shantavia was doing a great job, the manager said, and did not need any coaching. Shantavia later told Annie that she eventually wants to become an Assistant Manager at Publix.

Shantavia's life has been transformed in a year's time from the woman that I first had the pleasure of working with. I am so amazed at the work that Fran and her team did in order to bring success into her life!

I know that this is just the beginning of great things to come for her. I am glad to know that I was able to a part of her life.







Here are pictures from the annual Roosevelt Warm Springs golf cart Christmas Parade. This year's event saw a turnout of not only staff and students but many members of the community as well!





# TASH Conference 2017

## What It Means and Why It Matters

Late last year saw the annual TASH Conference in Atlanta, drawing delegations from around the world and aiming to help promote human rights and inclusion for people with significant disabilities and support needs – those most vulnerable to segregation, abuse, neglect and institutionalization.

GVRA Director of Transition Lauri Tuten said that while the goal of the conference has changed in the last decade, GVRA's place in it has grown in prominence.

"When I first went to this conference in 2007, it really opened my eyes about how our most severely disabled clients can go to work," said Director of Transition Lauri Tuten. "This year, we have some exciting things going on. I think we are a model. I really felt like we had a story to tell, and we think people can start from our story. It's all about collaboration and building

relationships. That's what makes it work."

GVRA Strategy Manager Robin Blount, who is a TASH board member and conference chair, said that the inclusive nature of the conference is what makes it so special.

"It brings researchers, college professors, students, people with disabilities. It's such a diverse conference, and you need people to come together so they can talk to one another," she said. "This is what you have to have for things to keep moving forward. This is why TASH has been so important in my life."

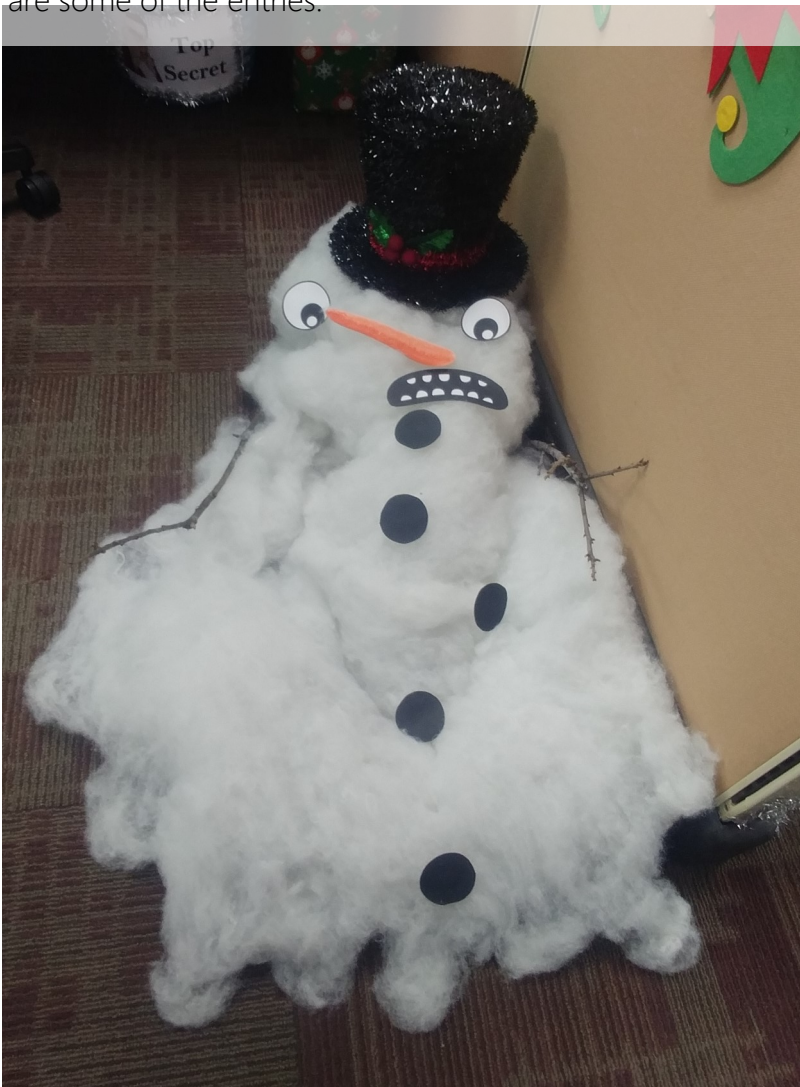
As a whole, she said, the organization has been life changing.

"TASH changed my world. It's all about full inclusion from birth to adulthood. TASH brought joy, inspiration and hope to me. I can't imagine my life without TASH."





The administrative offices at 200 Piedmont in Atlanta had a cube decoration contest for Christmas. Here are some of the entries.





# U.S. Jobs Shifting Towards Services

*Nonfarm payroll employment by sector (seasonally adjusted, numbers in thousands)*

Sector	Dec. 07	Oct. 17	% Change
Educational services	2,976	3,680	23.6
Health care and social assistance	15,948	19,574	22.7
Accommodation and food services	11,557	13,694	18.5
Professional and business services	18,051	20,870	15.6
Arts, entertainment and recreation	1,993	2,285	14.7
Transportation and warehousing	4,548	5,121	12.6
Other services	5,516	5,785	4.9
Financial activities	8,282	8,483	2.4
Federal government	2,757	2,814	2.1
Retail trade	15,571	15,815	1.6
Local government	14,481	14,456	-0.2
Utilities	557	553	-0.7
State government	5,139	5,091	-0.9
Wholesale trade	6,038	5,944	-1.6
Mining and logging	740	717	-3.1
Construction	7,490	6,930	-7.5
Manufacturing	13,746	12,481	-9.2
Information	3,024	2,716	-10.2
Total	138,413	147,010	6.2





Pictured here are GIB employees Aurizelia Woodward and Teresa Christensen in front of Belks volunteering for the Salvation Army. That's what the Christmas spirit is all about!



# Project Independence Training

## Learning to Serve

By Project Independence Program Manager Kay McGill

Helen Keller National Center, Vision Impairment Foundation of Georgia, & Project Independence, a part of Georgia Vocational Rehabilitation Agency, sponsored a Confident Living Program for senior adults 55 and over experiencing combined loss of vision and hearing. The program was held Thursday, Nov. 30 and Friday, Dec. 1, at the Fairfield Inn & Suites in Douglas, GA. Members of the Douglas Low Vision Support Group, each with a Support Service Provider (SSP), participated to learn information about living with combined vision and hearing loss.

Helen Keller National Center Senior Adult Program Specialist, Mark Armstrong, expressed that the Douglas Low Vision Support Group is a strong group of people led by Roger and Sara Allen of Douglas. "The Douglas low vision support group is an amazing example of a community that cares and people-helping-people. I am impressed with how supportive members of the group are for those living with combined vision and hearing loss". The group has several members who have vision loss, hearing loss, and combined vision and hearing loss - often referred to as deaf-blind.

Armstrong states that many of the members have developed these disabilities as a part of the aging process. The Confident Living Program, a national program led by Armstrong, is offered throughout the United States. It is designed to help empower and discover ways to positively cope with combined loss of vision and hearing. Featured topics of the program are communication and coping skills, independent living skills, adaptive and assistive technologies, local resources and

emergency preparedness.

The Douglas program hosted 16 participants and 12 speakers/staff altogether. Project Independence participants included Kay McGill, Program Manager; Wendy Mons, Executive Director, Visually Impaired Foundation of Georgia; Jacki Korzilius, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist/Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Savannah Center for Blind and Low Vision.

More information about Helen Keller National Center and the programs offered for persons who are deafblind can be found online at <https://www.helenkeller.org/hknc>.

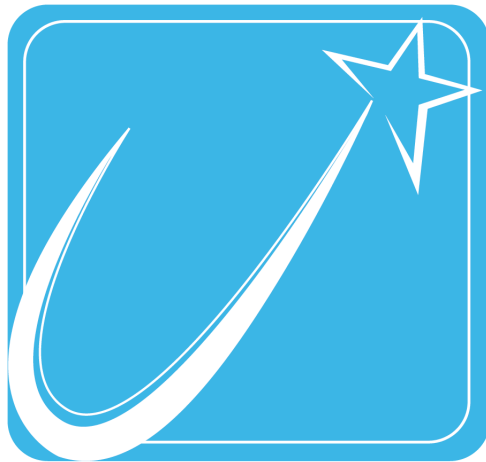


Pictured from left are: Wendy Mons, Executive Director, Visually Impaired Foundation of Georgia; Jacki Korzilius, Certified Orientation and Mobility Specialist/Certified Vision Rehabilitation Therapist, Savannah Center for Blind and Low Vision and Kay McGill, GVRA Project Independence Project Manager.



**Everyone  
has a story to tell.  
Share a success story  
with us, and it may  
appear in this newsletter,  
in our daily update or  
on our social media.**

**G V R A**



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